

Ask The Expert: Selecting Appropriate Hearing Protection—Ear Buds v. Ear Plugs



QUESTION

Do safety standards ban use of ear buds to listen to music while working in manufacturing? Can workers use ear buds for hearing protection?

ANSWER

Yes and Maybe

EXPLANATION

First, we need to define our terms.

Ear buds are the things you stick in your ears to listen to music. Use of ear buds by plant workers creates safety risks if:

- It distracts the worker;
- It interferes with their ability to communicate with co-workers, supervisors and other personnel;
- It interferes with the effectiveness of the hearing protection they're using; and/or
- The cord connecting the ear buds to the device may get entangled in moving machine parts.

Ear plugs are a form of hearing protection that may be used as long as:

- They're appropriate to protect workers from the noise hazards to which they're exposed based on sound level and duration;
- Comply with CSA Z94.2-02, Hearing Protection Devices 'Performance, Selection, Care, and Use;
- Fit properly; and
- Are properly used.